

VZCZCXYZ0002
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLB #0039/01 0091517
ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY AD1926F0 MSI4222-695)
P 091517Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3967
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3342
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3549
RHMFSS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000039

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY CAPTION
DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR I/O A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: PUBLIC STATEMENTS URGE RESTRAINT, 1701,
SOVEREIGNTY

SUMMARY

¶11. (SBU) Following the January 8 rocket-launching from southern Lebanon into northern Israel and subsequent Israeli response, Lebanese leaders have urged restraint by actors on both sides. In official statements and press interviews, key political figures have been moderate in tone, emphasizing the need for the GOL to maintain sovereignty over all its territory and for Israel and Lebanon to implement fully UNSCR ¶1701. With the southern border thus far remaining quiet, Lebanese leaders have been unanimous in their condemnation of yesterday's attack. These statements have depicted the GOL in a much more positive, unified light than usual. Press coverage and leaders' statements remain focused on the situation in Gaza.

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS STRESS SOVEREIGNTY,
1701

¶12. (SBU) Public statements by key Lebanese leaders following the January 8 exchange of fire between an unknown group in Lebanon and Israel have stressed, as we would hope, restraint by both sides and adherence to UNSCR 1701. Leaders also have emphasized the need for the Lebanese Government to maintain sovereignty and exercise control over all its territory. President Michel Sleiman, addressing the Lebanese diplomatic corps January 8, said Lebanon is committed "first and foremost to preserve its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and to act on implementing all provisions of resolution 1701." He also commended UNIFIL for its work in southern Lebanon and its cooperation with the Lebanese Army.
(See paragraph 6 below.)

¶13. (SBU) The Lebanese Cabinet, in an official statement issued after its January 8 session, affirmed its "unanimous" commitment to stability and to all articles of UNSCR 1701. (Note: The emphasis on unanimity is noteworthy as Minister of Labor Mohammed Fneish, a member of Hizballah, was present at Wednesday's meeting. Answering questions from the press after issuing the Cabinet's statement, Information Minister Tarek Mitri reiterated, "the minister representing Hizballah is a member of this government and agrees on every word of

this statement." Press January 9 also reported that during the session, Fneish said, "Hizballah refuses that Lebanon's territory be used as a launching pad for rockets." End note.) The Cabinet emphasized "its refusal to use the Lebanese territories as a platform to launch rockets, and to give Israel pretexts to attack Lebanon." The statement noted instructions had been issued to expedite investigations into the rocket attacks. (See paragraph 7 below.)

¶4. (SBU) In an official statement issued January 9, majority March 14 coalition hailed the previous day's unified Cabinet stance and reaffirmed its commitment to UNSCR 1701. March 14 said that UNSCR 1701 should be the cornerstone of the country's defense strategy. A January 8 LAF communique highlighted LAF efforts to protect citizens and "prohibit any side from taking advantage of the incident and sabotaging stability in the country."

SAME THEMES LESS FORMAL SETTINGS

¶5. (SBU) Leaders echoed similar themes in January 9 conversations with the press. Prime Minister Siniora told reporters after Friday prayers that the rocket-launching incident aimed to drag Lebanon into a dangerous situation and affirmed his persistence in implementing UNSCR 1701. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt in an interview with Sharq al-Awsat press January 9 called for solving the issue of Palestinian arms in Lebanon, which he said jeopardize Lebanese stability and security, especially in southern Lebanon. Jumblatt said the January 8 rocket-launching from Lebanon into Israel emphasized the importance of implementing Lebanon's National Dialogue recommendations.

TRANSCRIPTS

¶6. (U) Discussing Lebanese security and sovereignty during his January 8 speech to the diplomatic corps, President Sleiman said the following: "Having been able with its people, resistance, and army to liberate most of its territory from the Israeli occupation in the year 2000, Lebanon is committed first and foremost to preserve its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to act on implementing all provisions of resolution 1701, while reserving its right to regain its territories that are still under occupation in Kfarshouba, the Shebaa farms and the northern part of the village of Ghajar by all available and legitimate means. In this regard, I cannot but express my appreciation for the role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in South Lebanon and for the sacrifices it makes within the peacekeeping operations, and I commend the existing cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army in carrying out the mandate with which it is entrusted."

¶7. (U) The following was issued after the January 8 Cabinet session: "The Council of Ministers reiterates its assurance of the Lebanese consensus to condemn the horrific massacres perpetrated by Israel in Gaza, and holds it (Israel) entirely responsible, based on international law. It (the Council of Ministers) renews the solidarity of Lebanon with the Palestinian people in Gaza, who are the victims of Israel's ongoing crimes. It reiterates its call on the international community to stop the aggression and demand Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and lift the blockade from its people, and to provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the population. The Council of Ministers confirms again the Lebanese unanimous position on adhering to a national united position and Lebanon's commitment to stability and UNSCR 1701 with all its articles. The Council of Ministers categorically rejects the launching of rockets from the Lebanese territories and condemns the Israeli shelling which violates the Lebanese sovereignty and UNSCR 1701. The Council of Ministers emphasizes its refusal to use the Lebanese territories as a platform to launch rockets, and to give Israel pretexts to attack Lebanon and to drag into a war that would harm its national interest and does not serve any

Palestinian or Arab interests. The Council of Ministers confirms the importance of the LAF, in cooperation with UNIFIL, to carry on its full duties. Officials have given instructions to expedite investigations in order to determine the identity of those who launched the rockets and to arrest them. The Council also decided that the First Lady will accept the Turkish Prime Minister's spouse's invitation to attend the Palestine Summit to help the people of Gaza which will take place this Saturday in Istanbul."

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Emphasis on the themes of Lebanese sovereignty, restraint by all parties on both sides of the boarder, and adherence to UNSCR 1701 are exactly what we would hope for after an incident such as the January 8 exchange of fire an unknown group in Lebanon and Israel. Although public comments were issued January 9 regarding yesterday's incident, attention here continues to be directed toward the situation in Gaza and Israeli actions there. The U.S. abstention from the January 8 UNSC vote on Gaza was not a main focus of today's local press coverage. End comment.

GRANT